

The FY 2003 Quality of Life Symposium held in February was a resounding success. Family Readiness Group leaders and representatives from every company attended even though it was a Saturday and the weather was bad. That is the kind of commitment to soldiers that leads to positive transformation. Many of these ladies have volunteered to represent the battalion at the Brigade-level symposium this month, ensuring that your concerns are voiced and heard. I'm gratified to see that our program is succeeding and I can't thank enough all those who participated.

Your representatives briefed me at the end of the day on the issues and concerns that they discussed. My role is sort out which of these I can affect and which must be addressed at the next level. I have taken a month to do this and have outlined my findings below. I want to say again how impressed I am with the depth of the issues raised and the wide base of knowledge and experience that exists among the spouses of this battalion. I know that those of you traveling to the Brigade will represent us well.

Let me first list the issues that are beyond the scope of my command and will be sent forward. Items 1 through 7 are medical in nature the others require policy changes at the USAREC or DA level. Delegates at the Brigade symposium will prioritize these issues with others for presentation to the Brigade Commander. After his consideration, some of these may be forwarded to USAREC and eventually to the Department of the Army.

1. Eyeglass coverage for family members. TRICARE does not pay for family member eyeglasses or contact lenses. Frames of Choice is a program for military members only.
2. New patient physicals. If someone has had a physical within the past year, TRICARE will not cover a "new patient" physical exam when they begin treatment with a new health care provider.
3. Specialty care. TRICARE does not guarantee coverage for specialty care, even when local specialists are recommended by approved TRICARE providers.
4. United Concordia has a cap of \$1500 for life for enrolled family members' orthodontics. Most modern orthodontic care costs more than that over the treatment period.
5. School physicals. Although the state requires a student to have a physical for school enrollment, TRICARE will not cover it if the student has had another physical earlier in the year. School physicals are not transferable from state to state.
6. Access to primary care managers. In many areas TRICARE does not have participating providers.
7. Gynecological appointments. TRICARE will not cover routine appointments without a referral from the primary care manager, which requires an extra appointment.
8. FRG member use of a government vehicle. UR 56-1 prohibits FRG members from driving government vehicles. This USAREC policy is not consistent with Army policy elsewhere and should be reexamined.
9. Inadequate BAH levels for remote areas. Current allowances don't reflect accurate expenses for housing in many areas. Recruiters' families are forced to go out of pocket or live in sub-standard housing.
10. Permissive TDY. The ten-day permissive TDY allowance is not long enough to locate housing and should be increased.

11. Tour stabilization. The frequency of PCS moves does not allow time to recover from the expenses incurred which sometimes result in debt. A policy of longer tours would mitigate this.

12. Relocation expenses. Current per diem rates are inadequate for sustaining a family during a move, requiring out of pocket expenses. Increased rates would mitigate this.

13. Adoption reimbursement. Although the government reimburses adoption expenses for foster children and infants it does not cover soldiers who adopt their stepchildren.

14. GS civilian time-off awards. Currently a time-off award must be used within the fiscal year or be forfeited. These award hours may not be donated as sick leave for other workers.

The issues that follow are those that I can affect and I will briefly explain my position on each.

1. Westover ARB housing. The concern is that the housing office does not follow DA housing priorities when assigning housing, resulting in discrimination against Army recruiters. I have addressed this issue with the director of housing at Westover ARB several times during my command. I believe that they clearly understand the need for them to execute the policy fairly and I am confident that the next recruiter who seeks housing there will be treated justly. Naturally, if he or she is not, I will get personally involved, as I have before, and see that corrections are made.

2. TDY to the MEPS. The concern expressed is that recruiters are not permitted TDY overnight when they are taking applicants to the MEPS, resulting in some long days for recruiters in remote stations when they must process an applicant. The decision as to who may travel on TDY status at any time is mine. There is no regulation that guarantees a recruiter TDY on a trip to the MEPS, nor one that prohibits it. It is a call that I make based on mission requirements, safety concerns and budgetary constraints. That said, I have recently issued a local policy that these trips are discouraged because of our severe financial cutbacks. With anti-terrorism operations increasing overseas, we are operating on far less money than we did last year. One of my savings is to reduce these TDY trips. I have been gratified to see how well the force has responded to this need, increasing the efficiency of the trips they make and finding alternative solutions. At the same time, I recognize that some overnight stays are required and we have developed a list of hotels that charge an acceptable rate. Any perception that overnight TDY is “not allowed” is mistaken, however, it must be pre-approved, and each is examined individually.

3. Insurance coverage while operating a government vehicle (GOV). The concern centers on whether recruiters are covered by insurance while operating their GOVs daily.

a. The US Army, as a government agency, indemnifies recruiters against liability claims. When there is an accident involving other citizens, and those citizens feel there is a government liability, then they may file a federal tort against the government, but it in no way affects the individual recruiter as long as he was within the “scope of his duties”, in other words, not misusing the GOV. In my research I learned that right now there is a claim pending for several million dollars based on a recruiter’s accident – not one penny of which is he responsible for, because the accident occurred within the “scope of his duties”. So to say that insurance is required to operate the GOV is not correct.

b. Now, what can cost a recruiter money is the actual damage to the GOV. In cases where the recruiter is found to be at fault in an accident the government may, after an investigation, charge that recruiter for the damage up to the amount of one month’s base pay toward the actual damages. That has happened several times during my command. There are those, I know, who feel that since driving is required, these are costs we should absorb. The truth is that I have underwritten tens of thousand of dollars in costs where the recruiter was not at fault. There is no reason for me to do this if a law enforcement agency determines that the recruiter caused the accident.

c. Doing further research I discussed this with some insurance companies and there is at least one that has an add-on policy to cover a recruiter if he is ever held liable for that month's pay. Naturally there is a premium, and it is a personal decision. It is important to note that not all accident liability is for a full month – only if the damage is more than that. So this insurance is a personal decision that each recruiter must make. I don't know that all companies offer it, but again, your choice of company is your prerogative.